

By Staff reports

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August 12, 2016 6:39AM

PILOT FIRE MORNING UPDATE: Calm winds provide hope for more containment today

HESPERIA — Victor Valley residents awoke Friday morning to clear skies and virtually no wind, providing hope that the sixth day of the Pilot Fire will lead to firefighters gaining more containment of the 8,115-acre blaze.

Fire officials announced Friday morning that they have contained 80 percent of the Pilot Fire and look to increase containment by the end of the day.

Southern California Incident Management Team 3 spokesman Eric Sherwin said for the first time since fire crews began battling the blaze, he is expecting "significantly" weaker winds Friday afternoon.

With temperatures in the low-60s in Hesperia, firefighters are expected to again focus the battle on the San Bernardino mountain communities. Firefighters increased containment to 70 percent Thursday and fire officials began drawing down resources. After earlier in the week utilizing nearly 1,800 personnel and 98 engines, those numbers have dropped to 1,324 firefighters and 49 engines.

Twelve helicopters, based out of Apple Valley and Redlands airports, and eight air tankers continue to drop water and fire retardant on the stubborn fire, which began Sunday afternoon near Silverwood Lake and quickly resulted in the evacuation of 5,300 homes, about 500 in Hesperia and the rest near Lake Arrowhead, Lake Gregory and Crestline. Evacuation orders for Hesperia, Summit Valley and the Deep Creek area of Apple Valley were lifted on Thursday afternoon, but they remain in effect in the mountain communities.

The Apple Valley, Hesperia and Oro Grande school districts will be back in session today for the second straight day after closing all schools on Tuesday and Wednesday because of air quality concerns.

The Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District expects improved air quality again today, but said ozone levels will be high in Hesperia and near the mountains.

Temperatures on the fire lines will begin to heat up as well and will continue to do so through the weekend. Incident command expects temperatures between 85 and 90 degrees today, with relative humidity around 15 percent in the afternoon, increasing to 30 percent at night.

Temperatures in the Victor Valley also will begin to warm, with highs in the low 90s today, but increasing to triple digits on the weekend before cooling into the low 90s again by the end of next week.

Fire officials in their incident report said "threats to structures in Deer Lodge Park, Lake Arrowhead, Las Flores Ranch, Hesperia and Apple Valley are diminishing, but still significant. Protection measures for threatened and endangered species will remain in place for the Mojave River Forks Reservoir and Deep Creek areas. Threats will reduce as work progresses on securing the eastern flank of the fire."

This story will be updated as more information becomes available. Visit www.vvdailypress.com throughout the day and night for the latest news on the Pilot Fire.



Smoke from the Pilot Fire as seen from Main Street in Hesperia on Thursday. David Pardo, Daily Press

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/article/20160812/NEWS/160819928>

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Pilot fire reaches 8,115 acres, 80 percent containment (UPDATE)

By [BEATRIZ VALENZUELA AND ANNE MILLERBERND](#)

2016-08-12 06:55:15



Firefighters working through the night continue to gain control over the Pilot Fire, which now stands at 80 percent containment, officials announced Friday morning.

As of this morning, the fire had burned through 8,115 acres, only a small jump from Thursday's number of 7,899 acres, CalFire spokesman Daniel Berlant said in a Twitter post.

All evacuation orders had been lifted for the High Desert communities of Hesperia, Summit Valley and Apple Valley, but mandatory evacuations were still in place Friday for Deer Lodge Park near Lake Arrowhead.

The San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department said in a tweet that all evacuations would be lifted at 9 a.m. Friday.

Highway 173 at North Bay Road remained closed Friday, as did a handful of forest service roads and Grass Valley Road at Brentwood Drive.

The Pilot Fire was first ignited Sunday afternoon near Silverwood Lake and has since scorched about 11 square miles of land, officials said.

County officials declared a local emergency Tuesday, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency has authorized the use of federal funds to help battle the fire.

About 1,320 fire personnel were fighting the fire Friday morning, according to a fact sheet from the U.S. Forest Service. In total, 49 engines, 15 water tenders, 12 helicopters, 15 bulldozers and 45 hand crews were working on the fire.

Hesperia and Apple Valley school districts reopened campuses Thursday after having closed schools because of the fire.

No structures have been lost to the blaze, fire authorities said, however one firefighter did suffer a minor injury while battling the large wildfire.

Firefighters are being challenged by the mountain's terrain and the weather, the fact sheet said. Highs were expected to near 90 Friday with winds reaching as high as 10 mph, according to the National Weather Service.

The cause of the fire is still under investigation.

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By Staff reports

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August 11, 2016 6:44AM

Controlled burning in fire's interior creates some fear; Hesperia evacuations, all local road closures lifted

HESPERIA — Firefighters moved closer to encircling the Pilot Fire on Thursday, improving containment to 70 percent, lifting evacuation orders in Hesperia and reopening all roads in the High Desert, authorities said. However, firefighters also sparked some alarm among Victor Valley residents with a controlled burn in the afternoon that considerably increased smoke from the blaze for a time.

Alarm spread through the Victor Valley in mid-afternoon when previously light and minimal smoke turned to a large, dark smoke column. Fire officials told the Daily Press they received numerous calls from residents worried that firefighters may have lost control of the blaze.

California Incident Management Team 3 spokeswoman Breanna Thomasson told the Daily Press that the noticeably darker smoke was due to controlled burning within the Pilot Fire's interior. Thomasson reassured that the current containment lines were not being threatened due to the controlled burning. But the heavy smoke made its way to eastern portions of Hesperia and also into Apple Valley before dissipating by 6 p.m.



Firefighter supplies are sorted out and packaged at the High Desert Event Center for the Pilot Fire on Thursday. David Pardo, Daily Press

"The crews are burning out certain areas within the fire perimeter that are far away from any containment lines," Thomasson said. "The crews are just burning out some of the fuels that have the potential to later catch fire. Those fuels are not threats at the moment but burning that out gives us even more of a better feeling knowing they can't pick back up. ... When a fire burns through it doesn't just burn everything, it will burn around certain areas. Once these fuels turn to black, they cannot burn again. This is fairly common when battling large fires."

Fire officials said that winds continue to be a factor in containing the Pilot Fire, which has burned more than 12 square miles in the San Bernardino Mountains and Summit Valley.

However, Southern California Incident Management Team 3 spokesman Eric Sherwin told the Daily Press that none of the existing fire containment lines were threatened by the winds.

Fire officials said the blaze has consumed 7,899 acres.

"We do have wind on the fire today. However, the wind is not threatening any of our existing containment lines," Sherwin said. "The wind getting on the fire along with the residual heat that exists within the interior is still going to continue to create smoke for quite a while. But there are not any threats right now."

Sherwin said fire crews continued to work on containment lines overnight. Sherwin said he estimates firefighters have now created containment lines on the blaze's entire northwestern perimeter.

"The only open line we have is on the mountain side of the fire," Sherwin said. "We will continue to work with fixed winged aircraft, helicopters and ground crews to continue to build containment lines up there. We will also continue to improve the lines on the Hesperia side of the fire and mop up into the interior of the fire."

Sherwin said firefighters battled overnight winds that "carried through the night."

"For the last three days we have had a period each night where the wind dies off," he said. "That didn't take place last night. The winds pushed through the night. Our humidities were extremely low. But even with those factors we were able to maintain the containment lines previously established."

Sherwin also confirmed that no structures had been damaged or destroyed, but one firefighter suffered minor injuries while battling the blaze.

San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department officials announced that mandatory and voluntary evacuations in Summit Valley and Hesperia were lifted at noon Thursday.

The Sheriff's Department said in a news release that the road closures — including Arrowhead Lake Road, Highway 173 and Deep Creek Road, from Rock Springs Road to the spillway — would no longer be in effect. The Pacific Crest Trail will remain closed due to ongoing suppression efforts.

Authorities said to use caution due to emergency equipment that may still be in the area.

"We ask that residents returning to the evacuation zone please exercise caution," the Sheriff's Department said. "Firefighters, engines and heavy equipment continue to operate in the area! Southern California Edison will continue line repair along Highway 173 with occasional impacts to motorists."

"Incident Command has based its decision on the effectiveness of containment lines and decreased fire activity through this section of the Pilot Fire. ... Incident Commanders wish to thank the residents of Hesperia, Apple Valley and Summit Valley for their patience and understanding during the past few days while firefighters and law enforcement protected their communities."

All mountain area evacuations and road closures remain in effect, authorities said.

The Red Cross evacuation center at Oak Hills High School, which was opened Sunday night, closed at approximately 5 p.m. Wednesday. Sherwin said fire officials felt comfortable with shutting down the center as just a handful of evacuated residents had utilized it.

"Since we opened the center, it had become more of an informational center and we decided having the evacuation center at Rim of the World High School would be sufficient," Sherwin said.

The number of personnel combating the fire has been reduced by about 200. Sherwin said there are 1,324 personnel fighting the fire, down from nearly 1,750 on Wednesday.

Hesperia residents awoke to smokeless skies Thursday morning, as firefighters continued to get the upper hand on the fire, which is now in its fifth day.

Children across the Victor Valley returned to school, many after an unscheduled two-day vacation brought on by heavy smoke from the blaze, which has resulted in the voluntary or mandatory evacuation of more than 5,300 homes, most in the mountain communities of Crestline, Lake Gregory and Lake Arrowhead.

The animal evacuation center at the San Bernardino County Fairgrounds closed, and any animals not claimed by their owners by noon Thursday were moved to the Devore facility, officials said.

Students in the Apple Valley Unified, Hesperia Unified and Oro Grande school districts returned to class. All three districts closed their campuses on Tuesday and Wednesday because of health concerns brought about by poor air quality.

Although smoke lingers in the Victor Valley, the Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District said it is much improved. Ironically, ozone will be more of an issue than smoke on Friday, officials said.

Staff Writers Jose Quintero, Steve Hunt, Charity Lindsey and Monica Solano contributed to this report.

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/article/20160811/NEWS/160819960>

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San Bernardino County Sun (<http://www.sbsun.com>)

Firefighters at Pilot fire help clean homes covered in pink fire retardant

By Doug Saunders, The Sun

Thursday, August 11, 2016



Firefighters battling the Pilot fire were busy at work Wednesday in an added effort to help homeowners who left their homes behind under evacuation orders.

But they weren't dousing flames this time. Instead, they were helping residents whose homes were covered in a pink claylike dust called Phos-chek during the firefighting effort.

Phos-Chek is an aerial and ground applied chemical retardant for control and management of wildland fires, according to the website of its Rancho Cucamonga-based manufacturer, ICL Performance

Products LP.

"Our community has come together to support us in many ways," San Bernardino County Fire Capt. Mike Arvizo said. "This small gesture is a way for us to give back to them."

In some cases Phos-Chek, if not cleaned off quickly, could stain homes and vehicles.

"We're trying to help homeowners clean the retardant from their homes to minimize any damage," county fire Assistant Chief John Chamberlin said.

Phos-Chek is dropped from fixed-wing aircraft with specially fitted holding tanks designed for the pink fire retardant, according to CalFire's [aviation](#) website.

Some of the aircraft in the state's aviation fleet can hold up to 24,000 gallons of the fire retardant.

"When we saw those planes dropping so much of that pink stuff and dark plumes of smoke rising we knew the fire was burning out of control and we prayed our home would be saved," resident Tim McComber said. "Seeing the firefighters cleaning off homes made us respect them that much more. They and the sheriff's department did an amazing job saving homes, property and all of our lives."

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20160811/firefighters-at-pilot-fire-help-clean-homes-covered-in-pink-fire-retardant>

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Inland Valley Daily Bulletin (<http://www.dailybulletin.com>)

SB County supervisors should reject desert project

Thursday, August 11, 2016



The [Soda Mountain Solar](#) project might be a perfectly good renewable-energy project on its own terms. But it's in a terrible location.

Check that: It's actually in a fantastic location, much too scenic and ecologically important to have an industrial-scale solar energy plant sited there.

Those who drive the 15 Freeway to Las Vegas, Death Valley or elsewhere know the project's proposed site. It's about six miles southwest of Baker, near the Zzyzx Road off-ramp — a road whose improbable spelling makes its exit sign hard to miss as you speed along the 15.

The 287-megawatt project — enough to power more than 86,000 homes — would take up 1,767 acres of federal land managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. The city of Los Angeles has said it won't buy the power because of the project's environmental harm. The site is within a quarter-mile of the Mojave National Preserve, a national park unit.

The project is scheduled to come up for a vote of the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors on Aug. 23. The supervisors are to vote on whether to approve a well permit for the project, which would need to pump groundwater to construct and operate the proposed plant, and certify the project under the California Environmental Quality Act.

There are several reasons for the board to turn down the project:

- The site is so ecologically important to the Mojave Desert that two of the nation's leading ecologists — one of them the legendary E.O. Wilson — wrote a [guest commentary](#) in The New York Times imploring that the project not be built. The site is vital to the state-protected desert bighorn sheep because it includes a corridor that would allow sheep from Joshua Tree and other points south to interbreed with sheep from the Death Valley region to the north, thereby improving the health and survival chances of both populations. Seven retired superintendents of the desert parks, 70 scientists who study the desert and a host of others have written letters to the supervisors opposing the project.
- Desert tourism has become big business in San Bernardino County. Nearly 600,000 visitors to Mojave National Preserve spent \$33 million, creating 486 jobs in the region in 2015, according to National Park Service statistics. That's why groups like the [Joshua Tree Chamber of Commerce have opposed](#) this project's location, which would spoil views from the preserve and dampen tourists' enthusiasm for the area.
- The project violates the county's solar ordinance, which requires protection of wildlife corridors. Project planning began before the county passed that ordinance, but that doesn't make the proposed site any better.
- Approval of the project will just about guarantee that the county will be wrapped up in lawsuits that cost it a lot of time and plenty of money. The project's approvals have been rammed through on the federal level, and now the feds want the county to sign off on it too. The catch is that desert bighorns are protected under state law but

not under federal law. If the county OKs the well permit and signs off on the environmental review, it could be sued by the state (it's happened before on environmental grounds) and/or by environmental groups such as the Center for Biological Diversity, which is never shy about using the legal system against government agencies.

Renewable energy is a very good thing, crucial to the future of California without doubt. But this project does not need to be where it's proposed. There's plenty of better-suited land available land in the Mojave Desert.

URL: <http://www.dailybulletin.com/opinion/20160811/sb-county-supervisors-should-reject-desert-project>

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By [Shea Johnson](#)[Print Page](#)

August 11, 2016 11:03AM

Public safety employees receive 9-percent raises

SAN BERNARDINO — The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors approved 9-percent raises for more than 1,500 public safety employees, a move that the workers' union Wednesday described as "the beginning of a step in the right direction."

The contracts approved Tuesday come after roughly 18 months of negotiations that steered into an impasse in December. Supervisors ultimately OK'd exact proposals for employees and management that had been outlined by an arbitrator.

For 1,547 sheriff's deputies, detectives and District Attorney investigators, they'll receive a 3 percent across-the-board wage increase effective last week, with identical bumps occurring next year and in 2018. Across-the-board wage increases for 253 sheriff's sergeants, lieutenants and supervising DA investigators add to 8 percent over three years.

While Safety Employees Benefit Association representatives appeared pleased that top county officials had formally addressed what the union calls "a vast disparity in pay" compared to similar counties — reflected in high turnover rates and salaries that had been 14 to 27 percent less — they also made it clear they sought more inroads in future negotiations.

"We know the quality of work our deputies perform merits a larger increase than the contracts that were just approved," said SEBA spokeswoman Lolita Harper, adding that the deals "still leave us below average."

First District Supervisor Robert Lovingood said the contract approvals were "earned" by law enforcement.

"The demographic shift and impacts in retirements, the competition to hire the best and retain the best," Lovingood said, "is going to require that we continue to be forward-thinking in how we're going to attract and retain all employees."

He also noted that the board has devoted efforts to county employees for sacrifices they've made over several years during the county's fiscal recovery. In recent years, the county has operated under budget, funded retirements, upgraded infrastructure and pumped reserves to the tune of \$420 million, or 14.6 percent of locally funded appropriation.

But it's also that aggressive savings that SEBA officials say have come at the expense of its members as they forfeited raises.

"The law enforcement profession in general is reaching crisis levels in regard to staffing," Harper said, "and we must ensure public safety personnel remain a top priority."

The approved contracts also call for eliminating the first three steps of the deputy sheriff range, resulting in a 14-step range; increasing the fixed dollar bi-weekly Medical Premium Subsidy in each year of the agreement; and increasing annual uniform allowance to \$1,200.

For higher-ups, the deal also adjusts the administration of on-call pay and puts into place two days of paid bereavement leave, among other provisions.

SEBA members turned out to vote on the contracts in "record-breaking numbers," officials said.

"(They) took the initiative," said Laren Leichliter, SEBA's president, "and let their voices be heard."

The deals will result in additional costs to the county of roughly \$8.7 million for this fiscal year, \$15.3 million next year and \$20.5 million in FY 2018-19, according to a county staff report.

Formal negotiations for the next contracts are expected to begin in 2019.

Shea Johnson may be reached at 760-955-5368 or SJohnson@VVDailyPress.com. Follow him on Twitter at @DP_Shea.



The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors recently approved 9-percent raises for more than 1,500 public safety employees. File photo, Daily Press

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/article/20160811/NEWS/160819954>

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Short-term rental enforcement tightening



Lake Arrowhead Resident speaking about problems in her neighborhood caused by short-term rentals at the August 4, Lake Arrowhead Municipal Advisory Council Meeting (Photo by Gail Fry)

Friday, Aug 12, 2016

By Gail Fry At the Lake Arrowhead Municipal Advisory Council meeting held August 4, representatives from San Bernardino County Code Enforcement updated the community on its re-vamped short-term rental program developed after calls for action by residents. In an interview with *The Alpenhorn News*, San Bernardino County Supervisor Janice Rutherford Field Representative, Lewis Murray, explained, the draft short-term rental ordinance, updated in response to complaints, is being reviewed by legal, but is expected to be released shortly. For the past four years, Lake Arrowhead residents complained, at the Lake Arrowhead Municipal Advisory Council (LAMAC) meetings, that they were being physically threatened at their own homes or subjected to loud all night parties or witnessed carelessness with fires or had their road blocked by cars from renters of short-term rentals. In response, at a November 13, 2014, meeting, LAMAC executed a letter to San Bernardino County Supervisor Janice Rutherford requesting a meeting regarding issues posed by short-term rentals and asking the county to revise its ordinance. A LAMAC Ad hoc committee consisting of Voni Saxbury and David Caine was formed to look into the issue and make recommendations to LAMAC on how to revise its short-term rental ordinance to address negative impacts short-term rentals had on neighbors. The Ad hoc committee found anywhere from 2,000 to 4,000 short-term rentals in Lake Arrowhead not registered with the county, depriving the county of permit fees and taxes, and asking the county to increase identification and registration of short-term rentals, using the money generated to fund the personnel to enforce it. "We really went after it, we had people saying, oh you're really going to screw this market up, people are going to go underground, you're going to lose TOT," San Bernardino County Chief of Code Enforcement Andy Wingert voiced, reporting, "But that hasn't been proven, we are routinely scanning Airbnb, Thrifty and all those websites, finding properties on an average of 30-40 per month." He added, "I think we found some pretty bad actors

pretty fast and took on some high profile complaints pretty quickly.” “The program is reaching revenue neutrality,” Wingert shared, explaining, the county is looking to contract with a company to provide a 24/7 hotline, where residents can report problems with short-term rentals. He said the county took its short-term rental ordinance out of the development code to provide a more streamlined process for suspending and/or revoking a permit. San Bernardino County Code Enforcement Mountain Region Supervisor, Paul Kleinsmith, explained. residents can take a video and email it to them with the complaint, “Now we have much more solid proof.”

Wingert said the county has an app for filing complaints, the 24-7 hotline is (909) 361-1842, general customer service is (909) 884-4056 and its website is:

<http://cms.sbcounty.gov/lus/CodeEnforcement/ShortTermRentals.aspx>

“I don’t really want to be the policeman for these people who are running a business,” one Lake Arrowhead resident remarked. She said she would like to see that burden placed on the business owner, where they would have to hire someone to check for problems at the short-term rental. Wingert expressed its earlier drafts included such provisions, but there was “pushback.”

Lake Arrowhead Vacation Rental Owner Group Representative, Brian Follis, attended the meeting; opining, not all short-term rentals are “that way,” urging the county not to change the short-term rental ordinance. Follis claimed the council’s concern was brought on due to loss of income to local rental agencies and the sharing economy is here to stay.

As deadline nears, some local seats have no contenders

With filing deadlines for local political races approaching, some seats don't have any candidates.

As of late Thursday, San Bernardino County had a small handful of seats that no one had filed to run for, according to Melissa Eickman, the county's public information manager. Among them is San Bernardino Community College District, Area 3.

Eickman said about 300 candidates have filed with the county for local seats so far.

In LA County, there are about 90 local races up for grabs on the November ballot. The deadline for candidates to file is Friday. Some races could be dropped from the ballot if no one, or not enough, candidates file, according to California election law.

"We hear a lot about voter registration, voter turnout, but you don't realize that there are actually thousands of positions at the local level in particular that, that there are almost no one running for," said Emily Schwartz, a vice president at NationBuilder.

The company is funding work through the website [Run for Office](#) that helps link residents to open local positions like a seat on the school board or water district board.

They've created a searchable database of races with August filing deadlines. The database includes information on several counties in Southern California — there are 1,059 elected positions in Southern California that have a filing window deadline of Friday, according to the data the website has collected.

Alex Olvera, division manager of election information and preparation for LA County, said the process is easiest when you plan ahead. He suggested a few weeks to sort through the necessary steps and paperwork. But it's not too late to get involved—the deadline is close of business day on Friday.

For information on how to run for office, [contact your county elections office](#). You can also find information about how to file in LA County [on their website](#).

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County leverages demolition of burned building



The burned remains of Pazzo's Italian and Pizza as well as the Rim of the World Sports Bar and Race Bike Museum at the corner of Lake and Crest Forest Drives in Crestline (Photo by Gail Fry)

Friday, Aug 12, 2016

By Gail Fry Nine months after an iconic building burned down, a building that housed a popular sports bar and restaurant, at the prominent corner of Lake and Crest Forest Drives, viewed by all who enter the Community of Crestline through what is known as Top Town, the county says its goal is “ensuring demolition by the end of this month.” The building, built in 1929, where Pazzo's Italian and Pizza, as well as, the Rim of the World Sports Bar and Race Bike Museum were located, burned down November 19, 2015. In an interview with *The Alpenhorn News*, Crestline Chamber President Mick Hill explained, “We've been doing battle with them; I have been talking to the supervisor's office.” “Anthony (Vitale) just doesn't have the money, he was just going to dog it,” Hill alleged, explaining, “It's going to be one of those situations.” According to an April 19 posting on Pazzo's Italian and Pizza's Facebook page, the owner Anthony Vitale explained, “We're looking forward to wrapping up our dealings with the insurance companies as our next stepping stone will be cleanup.” “The process has taken longer than we would have imagined and has been out of our control,” Vitale voiced, adding, “We apologize to the Community for the unsightly mess as you enter beautiful Crestline.” San Bernardino County Public Information Officer David Wert told *The Alpenhorn News*, “The County has been as accommodating as possible to a citizen who lost a business to fire, while at the same time ensuring public safety.” “That's why the County immediately directed a fence be installed around the property, while giving the property owner as much time as possible to get his affairs in order and arrange for demolition,” Wert explained, assuring, “The county is continuing to work with the property owner with the goal of ensuring demolition by the end of this month.” Herington Real Estate owner, Cliff Herington, whose office is located directly kitty-corner to the burned out hulk, told *The Alpenhorn News*, “It's not good for the town when you drive into Crestline and that's what you see.”

Herington explained there has been very little activity in nine months since the building burned and he has only seen one container of rubble hauled away. Herington said he observed two code enforcement officers at the building last week “what they are doing I don’t know.” In a further interview with *The Alpenhorn News*, San Bernardino County Public Information Officer David Wert said, “We acknowledge it hasn’t been moving as quickly as we would have liked or what the community would liked.” *The Alpenhorn News* detected frustration. “They did take a permit in April and we are working to get it done by the end of the month,” Wert voiced, adding, “It does need to be done.” “We try to balance what is best and fair for the property owner against what is right and fair for the community,” Wert reasoned, explaining, “Sometimes people feel the county intrudes too much into people’s lives, sometimes not enough.” “For the guy who lost his business it can be the most traumatic thing that can happen in a lifetime,” Wert voiced. As to whether the building could be rebuilt, Wert explained, “The County hasn’t looked into that issue because the property owner hasn’t given the county any indications that they’re interested in rebuilding.” As to the cause of the fire, San Bernardino County Fire was unable to respond as of press time. Attempts to reach Pazzo’s Italian and Pizza’s owner Anthony Vitale were unsuccessful.



Arson suspect arrested after allegedly setting San Bernardino grass fire

By [JOHN M. BLODGETT](#)

2016-08-12 05:08:16



The fire marshal found and arrested a man on suspicion of arson Thursday afternoon not long after firefighters fought the vegetation fire he reportedly set, fire officials say.

Fire Marshal Mike Horton arrested Jonathan Lopez, 21, of San Bernardino on suspicion of arson of a structure or forest land, a felony, according to a post to the San Bernardino County Fire Department Facebook page.

Firefighters were dispatched 3:40 p.m. Thursday to a vegetation fire at Blair Park adjacent to San Bernardino's Little Mountain, the post states. They found a half-acre of grass already burned and the fire expanding up

a slope toward communication towers, and were able to contain the burn to one acre. No one was injured.

As two arson investigators set to work determining the location and cause of the fire, Horton sought witnesses in the park, the post states. He found a group of people who described a man they saw leaving where the fire might have started.

Horton patrolled the area and found a man, later identified as Lopez, matching the witness' description. He questioned Lopez, who allegedly admitted to starting the fire, the post states.

After Horton arrested Lopez San Bernardino Police brought Lopez to the Central Detention Center, where he is being held on \$100,000 bail according to a San Bernardino County sheriff's website.

Lopez is scheduled to appear in San Bernardino Superior Court on Monday, the website indicates.

The Office of the Fire Marshal asks anyone with information about the fire to call 800-468-4408.

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Harmony approved by City Council

Posted: Friday, August 12, 2016 9:36 am

Following a brief presentation by Patrick Loy, regional project manager for the Lewis Operating Corporation, a presentation by Highland Assistant Community Development Director Kim Stater and some minor changes made by the City Council, the large Harmony residential project was approved by the City Council Tuesday, Aug. 11.

The project includes 1,650 acres north of Mill Creek, east of Greenspot Road and south and west of the San Bernardino National Forest.

Only about 658 acres of the land is to be used by the 3,600 homes; the remainder will be open space.

In addition, inside the project there are parks, trails, retail, school and public safety areas.

Homes will range from 1,500 square feet to estate homes of almost 4,000 square feet.

The Tuesday approval climaxed over three years of community and government meetings, including three meetings of public hearings before the Highland Panning Commission and one previous City Council public hearing where numerous individuals expressed concerns about traffic, environment, schools and water.

The plan has undergone numerous changes and adjustments, including some at Tuesday night's meeting.

The public had its say again in a June City Council meeting. At the conclusion of that meeting, Mayor Larry McCallon closed the public hearing for individual testimony, leaving only the response from the developer before going to the City Council for final discussion and decision.

City Councilman John Timmer got some adjustments made, including provision for adequate fire protection before any three-story structures are built, deletion of any carports in favor of garages, elimination of campgrounds adjacent to wildlife corridors, walls and rails designed to discourage use by skateboarders, security lighting in line with requirements of Highland Building and Safety Department, and moving the planned fire station to a more central location in the project.

Although a large crowd showed up for the meeting, they understood that no further testimony, written or oral, would be taken, and sat quietly through the one-hour meeting without demonstration or protest.



Patrick Loy

Patrick Loy, vice president and regional project manager for Lewis Operating Corporation, addresses the Highland City Council Tuesday night, Aug. 11.

The meeting ended with adoption of the environmental impact report, amendments to the General Plan, approval of a zone change, adoption of the specific plan, approval of the development agreement, and approval of subdivision of the property.

Mayor Larry McCallon thanked the staff, the applicant and the public for their participation, concluding that because of the combination, "It's a much better project."

The project is a long way from the sound of hammers and saws, though. The City Council will need a second reading on some of the issues, and then will come specific approvals and details of the development before any construction

By [Shea Johnson](#)[Print Page](#)

August 11, 2016 12:57PM

Adelanto animal control officers can carry guns

ADELANTO — Animal control officers will be authorized to carry firearms on the job, an acknowledgement by the City Council that the line of work can be dangerous, but also a money-saving remedy to vulnerability at City Hall.

Under the policy unanimously approved by the Council on Wednesday night, Adelanto's three animal control officers will be issued city-purchased firearms. In addition to the training they've already received, they'll undergo instruction every four months under the guidance of the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department.

While the green light set off concerns from some who questioned the dramatic shift from non-lethal weaponry, with resident Jeanette Ansu suggesting hard-charging animals could be handled by a Taser, the focus of the Council seemed to be more so on the recent shootings in the U.S. in Dallas, Baton Rouge and San Bernardino.

Calling animal control officers "technically law enforcement," Mayor Pro Tem Jermaine Wright described their significance to public safety as surpassing their dealings with animals.

"They are the first defense if something happens here in City Hall," he said. "What are they supposed to do? I am a staunch advocate of being able to protect yourself."

One of three officers maintains a dispatch-type role inside City Hall and they'll be relied on now to protect employees and residents in the event of a crisis. Mayor Rich Kerr said he wanted an officer present in the facility 75 to 80 percent of the time.

The seemingly triple duty being expected of animal control — the officers are also cross-trained to perform code enforcement duties — highlights the city's press to bolster public safety within the constraints of an ultra-tight budget. The animal control department is essentially being asked now to supplement the efforts of three sheriff's deputies who patrol the city until a deputy can arrive on scene.

Kerr was clear, however, that the authorization to carry a firearm did not translate to code enforcement functions, which may be a tricky line to walk since many times the animal control officers quickly shift between the roles while out in the field.

"On code enforcement, no," Kerr reassured. "'Pull your weeds or we're going to pull a weapon?' It's not going to happen."

Following the Dec. 2 terrorist attack in San Bernardino, the city hired private security to monitor City Hall. Now, it will be the responsibility of animal control officers like Community Safety Manager Steve Peltier, who said officers "welcomed" the extra training.

"It's a sign of the times," he said about the situation.

Earlier this year, the Council passed a plan that laid the groundwork for animal control officers to carry guns, but officials were also adamant at the time that there was no indication the city would move in that direction. In February, an ordinance OK'd by city leaders authorized Adelanto workers with concealed weapons permits to holster their legal guns to the hip.

Shea Johnson may be reached at 760-955-5368 or SJohnson@VVDailyPress.com. Follow him on Twitter at [@DP_Shea](#).



Animal control officers in Adelanto will now be authorized to carry firearms on the job. File photo, Daily Press

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/article/20160811/NEWS/160819951>

[Print Page](#)

There's a new sheriff in town



Capt. Dale Gregory, newly assigned commander of the Twin Peaks Sheriff's Station, shared his law enforcement background and future goals with local reporters on Wednesday, August 3. (Photo by Douglas W. Motley)

Friday, Aug 12, 2016

By Douglas W. Motley Effective Monday, August 1, Capt. Dale Gregory assumed command of the Sheriff's Twin Peaks station. Gregory, with over 28 years of law enforcement experience under his belt, is no stranger to the mountain communities, having vacationed in the family cabin here for over 40 years. At an August 3rd press conference with local media at the Twin Peaks Sheriff's Station, it was readily apparent that Capt. Gregory is a "people person." Having served numerous stints at the sheriff's West Valley Detention Center, first as a fledgling deputy, then as an administrator, Gregory said, "The gift of gab is your best weapon." This, he explained, is because in an environment where no firearms are permitted – even among jail personnel – you can get more cooperation from detainees if you know how to talk to them properly. "I couldn't have a better assignment," Gregory said noting that the Twin Peaks station is one of only a few within the department where you can actually get to be a people person. Before being assigned to Twin Peaks, Gregory had headed the department's Emergency Operations Division, overseeing the department's Aviation and Volunteer Forces units. Pointing out that department volunteers include Citizens on Patrol, Search and Rescue, Reserve Deputies and Law Enforcement Explorers, Gregory said, "Volunteers are the backbone of this department." Other assignments during Capt. Gregory's career with the Sheriff's Department include patrol duty at stations in San Bernardino, Highland and Loma Linda, as well as the department's Civil Liability Unit, investigating officer-involved shootings and other internal affairs matters. One of the hardest assignments, he said, was interacting with and arranging death benefits for the families of five slain deputies. Asked what he considered his most exciting or dangerous career assignment, he told *The Alpenhorn News* it was when he was with the Inland Regional Narcotics Unit, where he served as an airborne observer in pursuit of the notorious Sinaloa drug cartel. "The scariest thing I ever did was flying a helicopter and chasing down criminals at the same time." Captain Gregory's educational background includes an AA degree from San Bernardino Valley College, a bachelor's degree in educational development and training from Southern Illinois University, studies at USC and a master's degree in human resources management from Chapman University. Chief among Captain Gregory's goals is to convince the department to hire more deputies for the Twin Peaks station. He said he would like to see four deputies and a sergeant assigned to each shift, instead of the current staffing level of two deputies and

a sergeant. Noting that there have been no promotions at the Twin Peaks station in eight years, he said another goal is promoting good performing deputies to sergeants. "And I want to make my sergeants lieutenants, so they can go elsewhere." When off-duty, Gregory says he enjoys both snow and waterskiing, flying and boating. "I also enjoy constructing and fixing things." His current construction project is remodeling the family cabin into a fulltime home.

By [Charity Lindsey](#)[Print Page](#)

August 11, 2016 5:44PM

MDAQMD 'definitely seeing improved air quality'

With school back in session, many parents are concerned about sending their children from the safety of their homes into the air which just days ago was deemed too unsafe because of the ongoing Pilot Fire.

Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District officials said Thursday evening that the air “is a much better situation than it has been the last few days.”

“The smoke you see today, from my understanding, is from containment,” MDAQMD spokeswoman Violette Roberts said. “The wind caused it to pick up a little bit, but as the winds die down, the smoke should too.”

MDAQMD did put out an advisory Thursday morning, not for the same “particulate matter” risks that the smoke has caused over the past few days, but for “elevated levels of ozone.”

Ozone levels are a result of heat, Roberts said. The High Desert areas at risk are Phelan and Hesperia.

“These elevated levels are only slight,” Roberts said. “Those that should be concerned are any sensitive individuals, such as those with asthma or heart and lung disease.”

Roberts said that while the elderly and young children can also be at risk, those going back to school should be safe as long as they continue to minimize outdoor activity.

“As compared to the levels of particulate that we’ve been seeing over the past few days, there’s no comparison,” Roberts said. “We are definitely seeing improved air quality.”

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<http://www.vvdailypress.com/article/20160811/NEWS/160819939>[Print Page](#)

LOCAL / L.A. Now

Thousands of lives could be saved in California by stricter air pollution limits, study finds



A nationwide study finds that Southern California has the most to gain from stricter air quality standards, which could prevent thousands of premature deaths each year. Above, a hazy view of downtown Los Angeles. (Damon Winter / Los Angeles Times)

By **Tony Barboza**

AUGUST 10, 2016, 11:25 AM

More than 2,000 Southern Californians die early each year from polluted air, and the region would benefit the most of anywhere in the country from reducing ozone and fine particle pollution below current federal limits, a new study has found.

The analysis by scientists at New York University and the American Thoracic Society, released Wednesday, estimated that more protective air quality standards would prevent 3,632 deaths a year in California, more than one-third of the 9,320 early deaths linked to dirty air nationwide.

The study estimates 1,341 avoidable deaths from pollution each year in the Los Angeles metro area and 800 in Riverside-San Bernardino. The region has “the most to gain” from attaining tougher air quality standards because of its large population and high pollution levels, according to the study published in the *Annals of the American Thoracic Society*, a peer-reviewed journal.

Southern California has the nation's highest levels of ozone — the corrosive gas in smog — and does not meet federal standards for fine particles, harmful soot and chemical-laden specks of pollution that can lodge deep in the lungs.

The “[Health of the Air](#)” report also found that reducing ozone and fine particle pollution levels beyond current federal limits would prevent many thousands of heart attacks, emergency room visits and other serious health consequences as well as millions of missed days at school and work nationwide.

The analysis paired pollution-monitoring data from 2011 to 2013 with health studies to estimate health benefits of tightening federal air quality standards to those recommended by the American Thoracic Society, a professional organization of more than 15,000 medical doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals.

The group recommends strengthening the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's health standard for ozone pollution from the current 70 parts per billion to 60 ppb and its annual limit on fine particle pollution from 12 micrograms per cubic meter to 11.

While air pollution puts everyone at risk, it is most dangerous to children, the elderly and others with existing respiratory and cardiovascular problems. On high pollution day, they can land in the hospital with more severe asthma, sudden heart attacks and strokes, worsened pneumonia and other illnesses that can be fatal.

“It can be that extra exposure to air pollution that tips them over the edge,” said Mary Rice, a pulmonary and critical care physician and assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School.

“

It can be that extra exposure to air pollution that tips them over the edge.

— Mary Rice, pulmonary and critical care physician and assistant professor at Harvard Medical School

Scientists long ago established that poor air quality shortens lives by worsening other illnesses. Previous health studies have shown that a long-term trend of emissions reductions — particularly for fine particle pollution — is, over time, resulting in fewer early deaths and longer life expectancy in cities across the U.S.

Yet the number of deaths from air pollution in the U.S. each year remains comparable to those from alcohol-related traffic fatalities, said Kevin Cromar, an assistant professor at NYU's Marron Institute of Urban Management and the study's lead author.

Published in conjunction with the report is [an online tool](#) that allows people to search for the air pollution health risks in cities across the U.S. Cromar said the website will be updated over time to “allow cities to track their progress as they improve air quality.”

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Steve Lopez on what's been saved along the California coast -- and what the bulldozers are still aiming for

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Assemblyman Jay Obernolte's Judge Shortage Bill Killed By Senate Committee

in [News](#) / by [Michael P. Neufeld](#) / on August 12, 2016 at 12:03 am /

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The Senate Appropriations Committee has killed A.B. 2341 by Assemblymember Jay Obernolte (R-Big Bear Lake/33) which would have added additional judges in San Bernardino County. (Contributed Photo)

By **Michael P. Neufeld**

Sacramento, CA – Assembly Bill 2341 — authored by Assemblyman Jay Obernolte (R-Big Bear Lake/33) — has been killed by the Senate Appropriations Committee despite having bi-partisan support.



Assemblyman Jay Obernolte (Contributed Photo)

Obernolte's bill would have provided Riverside and San Bernardino counties with additional judges to address their severely backlogged court systems.

OBERNOLTE'S COMMENT

"I am very disappointed that Senate Approps just killed a bi-partisan effort to address the judge shortage in San Bernardino County," Obernolte stated shortly after the committee's action.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For additional information about A.B. 2341 visit [CALIFORNIA LEGISLATION](http://californialegislation.com) online.

(36)



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San Bernardino County Sun (<http://www.sbsun.com>)

For water policy, hot and cold contradictions

By The Editorial Board, San Bernardino County Sun

Thursday, August 11, 2016



In the end, it will be state and local officials, not scientists, who put forward the ways Southern California deals with the effects of both the drought and man-made climate change.

But we expect policy-makers, even when they are not exactly brainiacs themselves, to keep up with the science on these subjects in order to make informed decisions.

It's scientists who discovered global warming and who now are studying its effects on the planet, as well as offering diverse ways to respond to the crises that will come with sea-level rise, dangerous

weather patterns, disruption of agriculture and other problems.

Drought and warming in the West are intertwined problems. They are not easy ones for scientists to offer simple solutions to. But that doesn't mean researchers should be, or are, throwing up their hands in despair. And a new study by USC engineers shows again the fallacy of claims that Big Science is somehow in cahoots with the political left on issues of water usage and warming.

In fact, [new computer modeling](#) by research associate Pouya Vahmani and civil and environmental engineering professor George Ban-Weiss, published in Geophysical Research Letters this week and first reported on by the Los Angeles Times, presents some confounding contradictions about how Los Angeles County should deal with the drought and the ways that can affect temperatures in the megalopolis.

If all lawns were replaced with more drought-tolerant landscaping, for instance, there would be a negative consequence most are unaware of: a daytime temperature rise on the average of 3.4 degrees, partially because all of that cooling water we now soak into grass would be absent from the soil. That's a scary side effect to the push for a lawnless SoCal.

But the engineers then discoverer an odd counter-effect: With no lawns (and also fewer trees), night temperatures in the county would be a startling 5.4 degrees cooler, more than making up for the daytime heat rise. There are complicated reasons for this prediction, and the scenario could never quite become the reality; there will always be some lawns, and we need trees for daytime shade.

But we also need scientists to constantly push the boundaries of our assumptions, and to give us grist for the mill of policy-making that will lead, we hope, to a sustainable future for Southern California.

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/opinion/20160811/for-water-policy-hot-and-cold-contradictions>

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LOCAL / L.A. Now

Probation statistics show increase in use of force at L.A. County juvenile halls



Graffiti on the walls of a cell at Central Juvenile Hall. (Azael "Sal" Martinez)

By **Abby Sewell**

AUGUST 11, 2016, 7:20 PM

Use-of-force incidents at Los Angeles County juvenile halls have increased in recent months, but probation officials say it's unclear what's behind the rise.

Overall, monthly use of force incidents increased by 85%, from 55 to 102, at the three county-run juvenile halls — Central Juvenile Hall in Boyle Heights, Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall in Downey and Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall in Sylmar — from January to July, statistics released Thursday by the L.A. County Probation Department show.

At Los Padrinos, the number of reported incidents rose from 12 in January to 31 in July. At Central Juvenile Hall, the number increased from 20 in January to 39 in July; and from 23 to 32 at the Barry J. Nidorf facility.

Each camp holds about 200 youths awaiting court action in their cases or transfer to other facilities.

The total number of force incidents remained relatively stable early in 2016 and dipped slightly in March, but spiked in June and July.

The department did not provide statistics for the same period in the previous year, and the figures provided for this year did not break down the level of force used or give context about the circumstances.

Probation officials who presented the statistics at a probation commission meeting Thursday said any time a staffer places hands on a youth, including to break up a fight between minors, a use-of-force report is triggered.

Department spokeswoman Kerri Webb said there could be “a variety of reasons” for the overall increase.

“While we do regularly review these incidents, we’re assessing this specific information to identify the reasons for the fluctuations,” she said in an email. “It’s too soon to know now what the results of the analysis are.”

The department has been under increased scrutiny over use of force in the juvenile facilities since June, when information about an incident at the Sylmar juvenile hall in April became public.

In that incident, video of which was leaked to the blog [WitnessLA](#), four probation officers allegedly pummeled a non-combative 17-year-old probationer. The case was referred to the district attorney’s office by the Probation Department.

Earlier this month, the county Board of Supervisors ordered the Probation Department to produce a report on how the agency handles so-called critical incidents.

The board is also exploring setting up an oversight body to monitor the department, and is considering an overhaul that would split the department — which oversees both minors and adult probationers — into two agencies, one tracking the adult population and the other overseeing juveniles.

The number of youths locked up in juvenile halls and camps has decreased substantially over the past decade, but probation officials have noted that as more low-level juvenile offenders have been diverted, the young people who remain tend to be higher-risk.

Cyn Yamashiro, the probation commission member who had asked for the use of force data, said he could not comment on the increase in incidents but hopes that the release of the numbers will signal more information-sharing by the Probation Department.

He and some other commissioners have complained in recent months that the department was slow to share information about the use of force.

“Today was, I think, the beginning of a larger conversation about two things — one is simply the use of force in detention facilities, and also how that information is collected and distributed,” Yamashiro said.

“My hope is that it’s going to continue, that we’re going to continue to try to figure out why we’re having the problems that we’re having.”

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['It appears that no one cares': Report slams Juvenile Hall for filthy conditions and poor leadership](#)

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LOCAL / CALIFORNIA

State is years behind on projects to protect wildlife at Salton Sea, officials and activists say



In some places, the Salton Sea's receding waterline has uncovered thermal fields studded with boiling mud pots spewing clouds of steam and sulfur dioxide gas. (Gary Coronado / Los Angeles Times)

By **Louis Sahagun**

AUGUST 11, 2016, 7:30 PM

The Salton Sea is in big trouble and plodding state officials are to blame, local authorities and environmentalists say.

The California Legislature appropriated money to start designing projects to restore wildlife habitat and control dust at the steadily receding salt lake in 2010.

But lawmakers did not approve funding to actually begin construction on those conservation efforts until June of this year, when they included \$80.5 million in the state budget for a few modest habitat projects scheduled for sometime next year, state officials said. Those projects comprise the first phase of a proposed long-term Salton Sea restoration effort estimated to cost about \$3 billion.

“

The state has been dallying.

— Timothy Bradley, professor of ecology and director of UC Irvine's Salton Sea Initiative

In the meantime, critics say, record-high salinity levels, die-offs of perch-like fish called tilapia, fewer birds and a "bathtub ring" of dusty playas stand as ecological emblems of what has not been accomplished.

"The state has been dallying," said Timothy Bradley, a professor of ecology and director of UC Irvine's Salton Sea Initiative. "And it would be unconscionable if it does not now shift into a very high speed to get something done."

Gazing at a squadron of brown pelicans gliding over the lake's hyper-saline waters, Valerie Simon, Salton Sea program manager at the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, offered a similar view. "If I was queen for a day," she said, "I'd make restoring this once magical place a top priority."

The Salton Sea was created in 1905, when the Colorado River broke through a silt-laden canal and roared unimpeded for two years into a basin near Brawley known as the Salton Sink. It grew into a 360-square-mile lake straddling Riverside and Imperial counties, about 150 miles south of Los Angeles. Fishermen flocked to its shores, and the lake and the surrounding area became habitat for more than 400 species of birds — half the entire number of species to be found nationwide.

One of the most important wetlands along the Pacific Flyway, the Salton Sea supports nearly 90% of its American white pelicans and 90% of its eared grebes.

Disputes with the state over the Salton Sea's deteriorating environmental conditions began in 2003, when the Legislature promised to slow the shrinking of the lake. The promise was made as part of a successful effort to persuade the Imperial Irrigation District to sell some of its water to San Diego.

Under the 2003 agreement, the district is required to send water into the sea until the end of 2017. Critics say that with the exception of three small habitat projects scheduled for construction next year, the state has failed to follow through on its promise.

California officials acknowledge that state conservation measures are behind schedule, but say permitting requirements, complex federal environmental protection laws, and haggling over engineering, contracts and funding are to blame for the delays.

"This work should have started years ago, so it's not unreasonable for people to be nervous," said Bruce Wilcox, who Gov. Jerry Brown appointed in 2015 as assistant secretary for Salton Sea policy at the California Natural Resources Agency to expedite restoration efforts. "But we are now moving forward as fast as we can on restoration projects because they are critical."

Those projects include a \$3.5-million plan to restore 420 acres of Red Hill Bay on the southeastern shore of the Salton Sea, and a \$30-million proposal to create a nearby network of estuaries to compensate for some of the fish and wildlife habitat that is being lost as the Salton Sea recedes and becomes more salty.

“Of course, we’ll need more funding to finish the rest of the program,” Wilcox said.

In 2010, salinity levels at the Salton Sea were about 50 parts per thousand parts of water, federal reclamation authorities said. Today, they are about 58.3 parts per thousand. By comparison, the salinity level of the Pacific Ocean is about 35 parts per thousand.

Over the last five years, expanses of dry lake bed two miles wide have replaced shoreline where fishing enthusiasts once caught croaker, corvina and sargo. Today, the only fish in the Salton Sea are inch-long desert pupfish and tilapia, a tropical species that has somehow managed to adjust to salinity levels that should be lethal.

In some places, the receding waterline has uncovered thermal fields studded with boiling mud pots spewing clouds of steam and sulfur dioxide gas that smells like rotten eggs.

A thin sheet of water on the east side of the sea’s Mullet Island recently evaporated, allowing coyotes and raccoons to raid the breeding grounds of tens of thousands of cormorants, pelicans and herons.

Chris Shoneman, manager at the Sonny Bono National Wildlife Refuge Complex at the southern end of the 35-mile-long lake, gunned the engine of his flat-bottomed airboat on a recent weekday and skimmed along the waterline, taking stock of bird populations that he said were “unusually small.”

He attributed the dearth of birds to a die-off of tilapia this year. After the die-off, he said, “grebes started washing up on shore. Necropsies determined that they had died of starvation.”

“The thousands of Caspian terns and Western grebes we normally get around this time of year,” he added, “are no where to be seen.”

“The state’s own scary predictions of more than a decade ago have come to pass — but its conservation projects are still not up and running,” said Michael Cohen, co-author of a 2014 Pacific Institute report titled “Hazard’s Toll: The Costs of Inaction at the Salton Sea.” “Our patience with the state is largely evaporated.”

Antonio Ortega, spokesman for the Imperial Irrigation District, would not argue with any of that.

“By failing to make serious investments,” he said, “or even starting construction on its restoration projects, the state is sending out a risky message: ‘Maybe the threat isn’t as bad as we thought it was.’”

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BUSINESS / Michael Hiltzik

Column California desperately needs affordable housing — but also a new blueprint for building it



A gardener works in the yard at the former Linda Vista Hospital that is now affordable housing -- but where will new housing go? (Christina House/For The Times)



By **Michael Hiltzik · Contact Reporter**

AUGUST 12, 2016, 8:40 AM

Kate Vershov Downing is a lawyer working for a Silicon Valley technology firm, married to a software engineer. But even with two good jobs in the household, she's been driven out of the Palo Alto housing market, where the home she rents with another couple costs \$6,200 in monthly rent and would cost \$2.7 million to buy.

The Downings are moving to Santa Cruz, where prices are somewhat less nuts.

"If professionals like me cannot raise a family here, then all of our teachers, first responders and service workers are in dire straits," she wrote recently in a regretful letter of resignation from the Palo Alto Planning and Transportation Commission. "We already see openings at our police department that we can't fill and

numerous teacher contracts that we can't renew because the cost of housing is astronomical not just in Palo Alto but many miles in each direction."

“

This governor has never seen a CEQA exemption he doesn't like.

— Kathryn Phillips, Sierra Club California

Downing's dilemma may be an extreme case, given the otherworldly housing market in Palo Alto and other Silicon Valley communities. But it's replicated across the state, where more than one-third of homeowners and nearly half of all renters are spending more than a third of their household incomes on housing — the official federal definition of “affordable” — and the rate of homelessness easily outstrips that of the nation as a whole.

One cause of the affordability crisis is that the state isn't building enough housing at any price. Construction in the state isn't keeping up with population growth, so housing costs rise across the board. That trend creates further ripples, driving up costs of goods, services and employment. [A dollar buys less](#) in California than in almost any other state, and housing costs are a major reason.

So it's proper that Gov. Jerry Brown proposed a solution to the crisis. But it's unfortunate that his plan plays right into the concerns that many in the environmental and civic planning communities have with the governor, including his apparent willingness to sideline far-reaching policies for short-term or narrow gains.

As [my colleague Liam Dillon has explained](#), Brown's plan essentially would grant housing developers a pass on environmental and local planning reviews if 5% to 20% of the units are reserved for low-income or affordable housing. The proposals would be eligible for fast-track approval if they met several other requirements: To be eligible for so-called by-right approval, they would have to be multi-family developments in urban neighborhoods and conform to local general development plans and zoning laws. In announcing the plan in May, Brown tied it to a promise of \$400 million for housing subsidies.

In a sense, the governor's plan acknowledges that the state is out of ammunition for sparking the construction of new housing for middle- and low-income families. Bond issues approved by voters in 2002 and 2006 provided nearly \$4 billion to build or rehabilitate more than 57,000 units for such households, but nearly all the money has been spent.

Community redevelopment agencies were required to set aside 20% of their revenues for the same purpose, a mandate that yielded more than \$1 billion statewide in 2009-10. But that source evaporated after 2011, when Brown eliminated the redevelopment agencies, which he said were wasteful and ineffective at fostering economic growth.

The administration portrays the new proposal as a way to “streamline” local and environmental planning, reducing bureaucratic and nuisance delays in the teeth of the crisis.

“Some people who come and protest new development have owned their home since the ’60s and ’70s,” says Downing. “They’re people who used to work as teachers, and now they’re drawing up the bridge behind them,” driving up prices to the point beyond what they could have afforded themselves. Brown’s solution, she contends, “does everything that needs to happen.”

The problem is that what looks like red tape and nuisance lawsuits to a real estate developer can serve as crucial and all-too-rare opportunities for input for neighbors and local officials. Local leaders question whether the streamlined process would give planners sufficient time to examine the impact of “by right” developments on traffic, light pollution, noise and civic services.

“Our residents expect to have a forum where they can express their views and try to mitigate these environmental issues wherever possible,” says Dan Carrigg, deputy director for legislative affairs of the League of California Cities. Labor organizations see the planning process as an opportunity to ensure union-scale wages for construction workers.

“Without the ability to engage on wages,” says Robbie Hunter, president of the State Building and Construction Trades Council, “they would go straight to the bottom.”

Some environmentalists see the governor’s plan as another expression of his hostility to the far-reaching California Environmental Quality Act, or CEQA, which requires detailed environmental impact reviews of construction projects.

Brown says CEQA is among the California conditions that make it “easier to build in Texas,” but is hard to change because of the “political climate,” as [he told Jim Newton](#) of the civic magazine Blueprint. “The unions won’t let you because they use it as a hammer to get project labor agreements,” he said. “The environmentalists like it because it’s the people’s document that you have to disclose all the impacts.”

Brown has attempted to deal with CEQA by advocating case-by-case exemptions; says Kathryn Phillips, director of the Sierra Club California, “This governor has never seen a CEQA exemption he doesn’t like.” Carving housing projects out of the CEQA process, she says, would simply serve developers’ purposes in “building as quickly as possible with as little oversight as possible.”

Even some affordable housing advocates who agree the approval process for housing is too prolonged question whether the governor’s proposal is entirely the right solution.

“We need 1.5 million affordable units in California, so we have to revisit the process so it moves faster,” says Christian Ahumada, executive director of Clifford Beers Housing, a Los Angeles nonprofit that has 448 homes and 310 apartments built or in the planning stages, chiefly for disabled persons, veterans, seniors, families and homeless youth. “We do need to streamline it, but we can’t cut out community input.”

Some argue the proposed threshold for “by right” exemptions is too low and the definition of “affordable” too lax — according to the federal government, it means housing that costs no more than 30% of household income, including utilities. That isn’t necessarily the same as low-income housing.

In Hollywood, where median household income is about \$33,700, the “affordable” threshold in monthly rent or mortgage would be less than about \$850. But in Santa Monica, where the median household income is nearly \$70,000, an affordable home would rent for or carry a mortgage of about \$1,750 a month. That mortgage payment could cover a home costing close to \$500,000.

Allowing developers to sidestep local planning reviews in return for a handful of lower-priced units would mean “getting too little back for what we’re giving away,” says Los Angeles County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl. “We get fooled because we call something ‘affordable’ if it’s just not at the market rate. This is the worst way to get affordable housing.”

Yet this all avoids the question of what is the right way. A measure making its way through the Legislature would place a \$3-billion affordable housing bond on the ballot as early as this November, but that money alone may not be enough to get housing where it’s needed.

The burdensome permitting process for new construction should be streamlined, but not in a way that cuts local communities out of the loop to the extent Brown advocates. A good plan would recognize that laws like CEQA have helped make living in California as alluring as it is, and shunting them aside won’t, in the end, get the state what it needs. The governor’s proposal is sound in principle, but it’s the first draft of a workable blueprint.

Keep up to date with Michael Hiltzik. Follow [@hiltzikm](#) on Twitter, see his [Facebook page](#), or email michael.hiltzik@latimes.com.

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LOCAL / L.A. Now

California gang database plagued with errors, unsubstantiated entries, state auditor finds



A suspect is processed in downtown Los Angeles on Wednesday as authorities round up members of the Big Hazard gang indicted under federal RICO statutes. (Irfan Khan / Los Angeles Times)

By **Richard Winton**

AUGUST 11, 2016, 9:10 PM

A California gang database maintained by law enforcement agencies is rife with unsubstantiated entries, names that should have been purged long ago and glaring errors, a state audit released Thursday found.

As a result of poor oversight, the CalGang database, which includes the names of more than 150,000 suspected gang members and affiliates, contains questionable information that may violate the privacy rights of many individuals, according to the audit.

In one of the most telling examples, auditors found the names of 42 people whose birth dates indicated they were one year of age or younger at the time they were entered into the database. Of those, 28 were entered for “admitting to being gang members,” according to State Auditor Elaine M. Howle.

Although state-funded, the CalGang database is overseen by an executive board and advisory committee made up of local law enforcement officials with no statutory authority. Howle noted that model means there is almost no public transparency or scrutiny of its work.

"Our review uncovered numerous examples demonstrating weaknesses in the user agencies' approaches for entering information into CalGang," auditors wrote

For decades the database has been a way for police officers to check on suspected gang ties and affiliations.

A sample of data from four user agencies — Los Angeles and Santa Ana police and Santa Clara County and Sonoma County sheriffs — found they “could not substantiate numerous CalGang entries they had made, demonstrating weaknesses in the processes for entering, evaluating and auditing the data in CalGang,” the audit said.

A review of 100 individuals placed in the database by the four agencies found 13 were “inappropriately included.”

Auditors found more than 600 individuals who were still listed even though their files should have been purged because they hadn't been updated within five years. Many of those records were not scheduled to be purged for more than 100 years.

In 2015, nearly 15,000 gang members or affiliates were added to the system while a little over 33,000 were removed. The database is overwhelmingly male — some 93.1% — and disproportionately minority — 64.9% Latino and 20.5% black.

Los Angeles and Santa Ana, the auditors noted, failed to fully implement a 2014 state law that requires juveniles and their parents to be notified before their names are added to the gang database so they could contest the decision. Of 129 juvenile records examined from the two agencies, 70% had been added without proper notification.

The LAPD did not explain the reasons why some minors were being added to the database and in some cases did not notify the juveniles at all or only after they were added.

Howle recommended that CalGang be overhauled with a new oversight structure, administered by the state Department of Justice.

Other recommendations include conducting public hearings and adopting new entry, review and information-sharing requirements. The audit called for police agencies across the state to do a comprehensive review of their entries.

Representatives of civil rights organizations said the audit confirmed what many have long suspected.

"CalGang is an ineffective tool full of inaccuracies that result in violations of people's rights," said Peter Bibring, director of police practices at the ACLU of California.

Many of the police agencies cited in the audit agreed with its recommendations.

In a response to the draft report, LAPD Deputy Chief Matt Blake said the department is revising its standards and expects to complete reviews in the next couple of years of all its 40,000 entries.

Blake, however, questioned the report's suggestion that the database entries had violated privacy rights, saying the accusation might harm public trust in law enforcement. He also praised his gang detail officers for their ability to identify gang members.

Similarly, Santa Ana Police Chief Carlos Rojas in a letter questioned how the report could praise his department's work in notifying juvenile's families but still be dinged for its overall performance on that issue.

The Sonoma County Sheriff's Department disputed the audit findings, saying the department met state guidelines for entries.

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California bill would limit sex offenders playing 'Pokémon Go'



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The Pokemon pub crawl hosted by Bar West and other Midtown bars and clubs on July 22 in Sacramento. Andrew Sengaseng@sacbee.com

By Jeremy B. White
Gotta catch 'em all!

Sex offenders, that is.

With the surging popularity of Pokémon Go, which allows users to “catch” digital critters superimposed on the real world with the help of GPS, it seemed like only a matter of time until policymakers sought new laws to counteract safety issues the game creates. There have already been reports of players [being robbed](#) or falling off cliffs as their attention wavered.

Now one of the California Legislature's most avid players wants to ensure sex offenders don't use the game to lure victims. Assemblywoman Ling Ling Chang, R-Diamond Bar, will amend her Assembly Bill 2682 so it would ban registered sex offenders from using the app with the intent of preying on kids, like by trying to lure minors to a specific location “for the purposes of meeting.” They'd need to respect buffers preventing them from getting within a certain distance of kids.

Followers of Chang's social media know she's an aspiring Pokémaster. She regularly posts updates about snaring the creatures on [while she's flying back](#) to Sacramento or [sitting on the Assembly floor](#). But she said games that rely on geolocation pose a threat to kids.

“I am Pokémon GO's biggest fan – that's no secret,” Chang said in a statement. “But as someone who uses the game, you can see how easy it is for criminals and predators to attract people to certain locations – and many of those players are minors.”

BUSINESS / AUTOS

Dozens of children die in hot cars each year. Here's how we can stop that



Irvine police investigate the death of an infant found in a car seat inside a parked vehicle at UC Irvine in August 2003. (Don Bartletti / Los Angeles Times)

By **Marc Olson**

AUGUST 12, 2016, 8:45 AM

The hot-car deaths of two children in Georgia last week brought the nation's total this year to 26, putting America on a grim pace to top its yearly average of 37, [according to data compiled by KidsAndCars.org](#).

The Georgia father was [charged with involuntary manslaughter](#) after leaving his 15-month-old twin daughters in the back of an SUV parked in Carrollton.

Four other children died over the July 22-24 weekend, in Florida, Pennsylvania, Missouri and Texas, the nonprofit said.

In recent years as the number of hot-car deaths has risen, some car companies and makers of baby products have started developing new technologies to help remind parents to check the back seat.

Before the mid-1990s, the deaths were rare — usually the result of children entering unlocked vehicles and being unable to escape when the vehicle heated up, said Amber Andreasen, director of KidsAndCars.

Then things changed.

“We had this crazy trend in the mid- to late ‘90s,” she said.

That jump coincided with recommendations that parents put children in the backseat because of the danger posed by airbags, which automakers [introduced in the mid-1980s and which became mandatory in 1998](#).

“Not only are they in the backseat, but now they’re rear-facing,” Andreasen said. That makes it easy for the driver to forget the child is present.

So what can be done? KidsAndCars has advocated a chime that would sound when a driver opens his door while a weight is still detected on the backseat. Others have suggested parents take matters into their own hands — such as putting a stuffed animal on top of their purse or briefcase as a reminder that a child is in the back.

The 2017 GMC Acadia SUV [offers a Rear Seat Reminder system](#) that monitors the rear doors, activating if the car starts within 10 minutes of opening and closing a rear door — which would probably mean the driver just put something in the backseat. When the car is turned off, chimes sound and a message appears on the dashboard telling the driver to check the backseat. The system is standard equipment starting with the 2017 model year.

Makers of baby products are also stepping in.

Evenflo offers the [Sensorsafe car seat](#), which has a chest clip that communicates with a receiver plugged into a dashboard port. The system sounds a chime when the car is turned off, reminding the driver that a child is in the backseat, and also sounds if the clip is unfastened during transit. The price is about \$150.

[Sense a Life](#) is a product [developed by two Tampa engineers](#) that deploys sensor pads in the car seat and driver’s seat. If the driver leaves his seat and the car seat pad still detects a weight of at least 2 pounds, a message is sent to the driver’s smartphone reminding him to remove the child. If the driver doesn’t respond, another alert is sent to a second parent or caregiver. The product isn’t on the market yet.

TOMY International’s First Years car seat sends an alarm to the driver’s cellphone if the seat gets too hot. The company [discontinued the product in 2014](#), but it’s still available on Amazon for about \$140.

Because the problem was dramatically worsened by the introduction of airbags and the practice of putting children in the backseat, how about allowing parents to disable or opt out of the airbag and put the child in the front passenger seat?

No way, Andreasen said. “Children are much safer in the back.”

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EDITORIAL: Kick roadside drug and DNA tests to the curb

2016-08-11 20:00:08

Roadside drug tests can be a good tool for police to determine whether someone has broken law and potentially poses a threat to others, but they can also get you locked up for eating a glazed donut.

A Florida man is suing the Orlando Police Department after he was arrested on officers' mistaken claims that he was in possession of crystal methamphetamine. During a traffic stop, the officers noticed a few whitish flakes on the floorboard of Daniel Rushing's car and alleged that they were crystal meth. "I recognized through my 11 years of training and experience as a law enforcement officer the substance to be some sort of narcotic," one of the officers wrote in a report. In fact, it was just some crumbs from the glaze of a Krispy Kreme doughnut Mr. Rushing had consumed.

But a field drug test nonetheless indicated that the doughnut glaze tested positive for crystal meth, leading to Mr. Rushing being handcuffed, arrested and strip searched at the county jail. Several weeks later, a state crime lab test exonerated him, but not before he unjustly spent 10 hours locked up in jail and had to post a \$2,500 bond.

Such occurrences are shockingly common. These pages discussed several other such cases – including the Minnesota man who spent more than two months in jail because a bag of vitamins in his car tested positive for amphetamines in a police field drug test, and another Florida man who was arrested after the mints he was chewing tested positive for crack cocaine – in an editorial in January.

A 2009 Marijuana Policy Project study found that such tests yielded false positive results 70 percent of the time in a test of 43 candies, over-the-counter medicines, plants and other harmless substances. A six-month investigation done by Fox 13/TV in Tampa, Fla., found similar weaknesses in the test results. "We watched as aspirin, cough medicine, coffee and spices like oregano – and even air – tested positive for illegal drugs," reporter Gloria Gomez said.

To make matters worse, Congress is considering legislation that would allow police to utilize a field test to collect genetic material from detainees and suspects. Under the Rapid DNA Act, S.2348, which the Senate passed by unanimous consent in June, officers could obtain DNA evidence from a cheek swab and the results would be checked against the FBI's central DNA database.

This raises troubling privacy concerns, which should give members in the House great pause when they consider the bill. We should not be encouraging police to take DNA evidence from everyone they encounter and building a massive biometric database, particularly with evidence from innocent citizens.

Then there are the accuracy issues. Police officers are not scientists, but even if the Rapid DNA system is easy enough for anyone to use, experience with the roadside drug tests has shown that the results can be far from reliable, resulting in the incarceration of innocent people. Until greater accuracy of such testing can be verified, Congress and local police should not even consider authorizing or using them.

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